

NEEDS ASSESSMENT PRACTICES OF MANAGERS AND TRAINERS

A Thesis
Presented to
the School of Education
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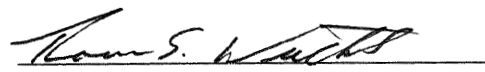

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This qualitative study examined several questions about needs assessment activities in organizations. Does the latest knowledge about needs assessment within the training and development profession contrast with actual practice and is this same knowledge utilized by managers and others making training decisions in the workplace? Do managers have their own body of knowledge that is unappreciated by the training and development professional or is there a practical body of thought that determines when training will be performed in the organization? What techniques have managers and other members of the organization devised to determine training needs? Do any of these suggest matters that training and development professionals should address?

In the context of this study, managers performed many of the same activities that would be considered essential to a structured needs assessment advocated by training and development professionals. These activities were not categorized by the participants as needs assessment. Desirable organizational goals were sufficiently rewarding to justify substantial investment in preparation. Additional research might suggest ways to measure the cost and benefit of needs assessment in financial terms and reveal ways to that some of the less quantifiable goals can be expressed in a common language for the training profession and managers.

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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

This study was undertaken to examine how training and development decisions are made in the workplace. It is intended to be a useful investigation of actual phenomena and a comparison of this reality with professional methodology. A formal body of knowledge exists about training decisions in the workplace. Perhaps some practices exist in the workplace that solve training problems but are not within the professional repertoire.

This study has compared what occurred in the workplace to the methods and practices recommended by the profession. The choices of methods employed to determine training needs and their scope have been studied. Information was gathered about the reasoning used to pick the training and development methods that were used.

Much of the training that occurs in organizations is directed by managers. They have a great deal of influence and perhaps are the dominant influence on most training efforts in the workplace. The formal education of managers includes many things but little about training. Presumably managers do not practice within the same framework as a training and development professional. Managers do succeed in at least some of their efforts and it is useful to look at the methods employed in place of relying on a needs assessment by a training and development professional. Managers must be finding viable

training strategies in order to succeed. After all, their career survival might not have been possible if they had not successfully solved some training needs.

The following research questions are addressed in this study. Does the latest knowledge about needs assessment within the training and development profession contrast with actual practices in the organization? Is this same knowledge utilized by managers and others making training decisions in the workplace? Do managers have their own body of knowledge that is unappreciated by the training and development professional? Is there a practical body of thought that determines when training will be performed in the organization? If managers are the current, predominant, and enduring occupation that causes training, then what techniques to determine training needs have evolved in their domain? Do any of these suggest matters that training and development professionals should address?

This effort focused on how decision makers and trainers chose training methods, determined needs, implemented training, and evaluated results. This study did not focus on a particular type of training or development. The purposes of the training discussed ranged from training to roll-out of specific products to general employee development. Training topics ranged from proprietary technical skills to broad professional development.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature is divided into six sections. The first four sections discuss major topics covered in literature widely available to the training profession and others. Needs assessment, need for training, levels of need, and instructional design are topics that have each been covered by the insights of several authors. The fifth section summarizes this literature. The final section of this review examines research studies which cover situations adjacent to or overlapping the scope of this study.

Needs Assessment

Rossett (1987) defined a useful framework for needs assessment. She said the impetus for needs assessment comes from five purposes. These five purposes are where all of the reasons for needs assessment are found. These purposes are optimal, actual, feelings, causes, and solutions.

These purposes categorize the various kinds of information that are useful and necessary for needs assessment. Optimal describe the ideal performances, techniques, or results that are desired. Actual are the current performances, techniques, or results. Feelings are expressed by trainees or other involved parties. Trainees and other involved parties can offer their perspectives on the causes and solutions for the differences between actual and optimal.

Rossett's study provided a framework for needs assessment by proposing tools and techniques appropriate for needs assessment. She suggested that three techniques are combined with four tools to fulfill the five purposes of needs assessment. These might be considered the endorsed tools and techniques that a training professional would use to analyze needs.

The three techniques are extant data analysis, opinion seeking, and subject matter analysis. The technique used is determined by the type of information being sought. Extant data analysis is appropriate for determining actuals. Reports and correspondence can be reviewed to gain a better picture for the current situation. Subject matter analysis is useful to find the optimal that should be expected. Opinion seeking is useful for all purposes of needs assessment.

In her 1987 book Rossett used the terminology "training needs assessment" to refer to the broad process of needs assessment for performance problems. She used the term "needs assessment" to refer to the technique of seeking opinion. The researcher has taken some liberty with regard to terminology and used needs assessment to refer to what Rossett's book calls "training needs assessment." Opinion seeking is the terminology used here instead of needs assessment to avoid confusion with the larger process. Rossett defined needs assessment as the way to seek opinions about all of the purposes of training needs assessment.

This alteration of terminology makes it easier to compare and contrast Rossett's fundamentals with those of other writers. In more current literature Rossett (1990) used

the terminology “needs assessment” in place of “training needs assessment.” It seems that Rossett has also made a transition with regard to terminology.

Interviews, observations, groups, and surveys are the tools Rossett recommended. Interviews can be used for opinion seeking and subject matter analysis. Interviews can also uncover extant data. Observation can be done with extant data analysis and subject matter analysis. Groups can be formed to find consensus on opinions. Surveys are particularly useful for opinion seeking. Surveys are most frequently used to seek opinions about actuals, feelings, and causes.

These tools and techniques are combined to study needs found during needs assessment with respect to optimal, actuals, causes, feelings, and solutions. These techniques and tools are combined to analyze purpose surrounding the performance problems.

Rossett (1990) warned that obstacles stand in the way of performing needs assessment. Because of this, needs assessment is often not done. This is unfortunate because the wrong training might be provided. Too much or too little training could be delivered. Often, training interventions could be done when another solution would be more appropriate.

Even when needed, training should often be supported with other interventions. If supervisors do not support the training they may alter or even prevent the exercise of the training objectives. Training can fail if the organizational factors are not consistent with the objectives. Trainees are members of the organization first and trainees second.

Laird (1985) wrote about ways that the training and development professional can identify training needs. Many of these methods are indirect in that they involve finding managers that already have the information. The training and development officer must ask questions, read reports, or be notified by a manager. This indirect information gathering process might happen if the training and development officer is involved. Many training efforts are made without the involvement of a training and development professional.

Spitzer (1990) proposed seven principles for the practice of performance technology.

1. Objective analysis (with no preconceptions) must precede the design and development.
2. There should be no prior commitment to any solution or class of solutions.
3. People really want to do a good job, but they are often constrained from doing so by environmental factors.
4. Work environments tend to non-systematically evolve, rather than being purposefully designed to optimize human performance, and therefore they need to be systematically redesigned.
5. All performance must be viewed in its total system context.
6. Training alone is rarely successful in achieving long-term verifiable performance improvement.
7. Everything can be improved!

Sleezer (1993) also noted some prevailing confusion about terminology. She noted that Kaufman says that needs must first be identified, then analyzed supporting the sequence of needs assessment and then needs analysis. She offered the alternative term, performance analysis which focuses on the overall objective of a better performance.

Sleezer wrote about three elements that influence the needs assessment process. These elements are (1) organization characteristics, (2) decision-maker characteristics, and (3) analyst characteristics. These elements influence the process and the product of needs assessment.

Sleezer urged readers to think of organizations as systems. The systems perspective provides a framework in which training is not necessarily the solution. She described the characteristics of the organizations in which these systems reside. Sleezer proposed the systematic view of looking at the entire organization rather than just the trainees.

Organizations are cultural entities with shared beliefs and assumptions. In addition, organizations are political entities. Ignoring the political structure of an organization may be a recipe for failure by the trainer. Trainers need political support to gain access to the resources that feed their efforts. Political support is part of the effective sponsorship needed for participants to buy in to new programs.

Finally, organizations are rhetorical entities. Members of an organization share some common language that they use to disseminate their vision and influence other members. Communication within an organization is generally an established tool to effect change.

Sleezer described how decision-makers in the organization influence needs assessment. She referenced Vinton, Clark, and Seybolt (1983) by saying that the decision-makers may create constraints that prevent knowledge, skills, and attitudes from

transferring to the job. The relevant decision-maker(s) must be involved so their actions will be aligned with the needs assessment process.

Finally, Sleezer discussed the influence that the analyst has on the needs assessment process. Naturally the analyst may choose to include a variety of information gathered during the assessment process. Their own perceptions make each analyst's approach unique.

Sleezer noted some contrasting characteristics between analysts from within the organization and those from outside. Analysts on the inside are likely to have better access to situations, individuals, and resources. Constraints of power and organizational politics may limit their efforts.

Outside analysts are better positioned to identify the organization's culture. They may have applicable experience with other organization which can bring a fresh perspective. They arrive with less limitation on their credibility. The outside analyst has less to lose if things go wrong.

Outside analysts will have less insight regarding the inner workings of the organization. They will have limited access to resources within the organization. They might be better able to identify the organizational culture but interpretation may suffer from the lack of an inside perspective.

Clark (1994) wrote about the practice of performance technology. She wrote to an audience in the training profession that is open to employing the tools of performance

technology. Clark indicated that a performance technologist should start with business goals in mind rather than a training solution.

More recent authors described the practice of performance technology. Performance technology avoids the constraints that are implied when a trainer is employed to provide training. Performance technology looks for ways to improve performance in a framework consistent with Rossett's purposes. A wider array of solutions characterize performance technology; training is one of several components of a performance technology solution.

Kaufman (1994) wrote that needs assessment is a powerful tool to identify what is working and what is not working in organizations. He defined needs assessment as the process for identifying needs (gaps) and prioritizing these needs. A need is the gap between a current result and the desired or required result. Prioritization is a process of ranking the net cost/benefit of filling the various gaps

Kaufman cautioned that an intervention should not be selected before a needs assessment is done. He included training, human resource development, restructuring, and total quality management as interventions. The most effective intervention or combination of intervention should be selected after a needs assessment has been done.

Kaufman has prepared a 16 item checklist designed to audit the thoroughness of a needs assessment program. He suggests the following subset of 6 absolutely vital elements.

1. Recognition that needs are gaps between current and desired results.

2. Ends are distinguished from results.
3. The statement of need is free from any indication of how the need will be met.
4. The statement of need is free from any indication of what resources will be used.
5. Needs are prioritized by comparing the cost to meet the need to the cost to ignore the need
6. Needs are listed in priority order.

Triner et al. (1996) discussed a framework for understanding the terms and concepts associated with needs assessment. Training needs assessment is a term often used to describe a broad process that might better be described as needs assessment. Training needs assessment is an oxymoron because it presupposes that training will be part of the recommended result. If there is to be an objective assessment, then solutions other than training may be the result.

The authors proposed consistent terminology. A “need” is “the gap between current and desired (or required) results, or (stated another way) the gap between ‘what is’ and ‘what should be’.” A “needs assessment” is “a process to identify the needs and place them in priority order on the basis of what it costs to ignore it as compared to the value it adds to society and the organization.”

A “needs analysis” is “a process to determine the reasons and causes for a need so that appropriate interventions may be identified and later selected.” According to Triner et al., a “training needs assessment” is an oxymoron. A selection of the means—training—to meet the need, before determining what the need is. A more appropriate term to use for training needs assessment is training requirements analysis.

A “training requirements analysis” is put into perspective by noting that “a needs assessment and needs analysis help determine if training is the solution, or part of the solution, to meet the need. Once the ‘why training’ is established, a training requirements analysis is conducted to determine the who, what, when, where, and how training might be best employed.” Triner said that needs assessment should look at the difference between current results and the results that should be achieved.

Zemke (1998) wrote about the lack of time to do proper needs assessment. The customers of the training department want solutions and they do not want to wait for a lengthy research study. He quoted Rossett as saying “I’m not so sure a lot of people have ever done a complete needs assessment” Even so, some needs assessment is essential in order to know how performance has gone wrong.

Zemke made a number of suggestions for a common sense approach to needs assessment when faced with a lack of time. A few hours of interviewing is likely to be very valuable. Interviews can be curtailed or expanded during the process depending on the amount of useful information gathered.

Existing data should be utilized if possible. This can reduce the need for new data collection. Information from previous assessments or information collected for other purposes can be used. A proactive awareness of current organizational activities and changes can lead to preparation before a performance need is perceived.

Elliott (1996) discussed human performance technology as the practice of optimizing performance of individuals in organizations. The practice of human

performance technology has the same or similar objectives as the needs assessments discussed by the other authors. Elliott said that human performance technology uses a systems approach to performance improvement recognizing that there are a variety of issues affecting performance. Training related issues such as the lack of knowledge or skills are included but these are only part of relevant systems.

Elliott proposed a four step process for human performance analysis. These four steps are (1) align, (2) analyze, (3) diagnose, and (4) plan. The analysis must be aligned with the desired outcomes of the client. According to Elliott, a successful project identifies and achieves the objectives or accomplishments valued by the organization. Standards of quantity, quality, and cost measure the degree of success.

Although these authors have been somewhat inconsistent in their terminology they have been consistent in saying that needs assessment is not merely a process to find places to employ training. Training can be a solution to performance problems but should not be presumed. Assessment should be done to avoid the very great risk that the wrong solution may be provided. An objective approach is critical because it is often too easy for a trainer to propose a training solution.

Even when it is clear that training is needed, the appropriate issues for training must be identified. Even so, trainees may receive the proper training but be returned to a supervisor or system that resists the training objectives. Performance technology encompasses the activities that most effectively resolve gaps found during needs assessment.

The authors were very consistent in warning practitioners about the dangers of presuming that training is a solution before the needs assessment begins. They urge readers be the judicious guardians of the training solution and recommend other interventions when appropriate.

Most of the authors acknowledged that is very difficult to practice effective needs assessment. Trainers are expected to fulfill a role that naturally is perceived by others in the organization to include mostly training. Other activities, such as needs assessment, are often viewed by outsiders as a bad use of time that could be better used designing and delivering training. When trainers propose solutions other than training they can be perceived as straying from their proper role in the organization.

Need for Training

Laird (1985) prefaced his discussion of needs analysis by saying that when you first encounter a performance problem you can determine if there is a training need. If the employee knows how to meet the performance standard then there are other obstacles to the solution. Laird indicated that a training needs occurs where there is a lack of knowledge or skill to perform a task satisfactorily.

Laird proposed the equation $M - I = D$ to represent potential training needs. M represents what the worker must do and I represents their current inventory of skills. D represents the deficiency between the “must do” and “is doing.” D is the potential training need. The deficiency may or may not be comprised of training needs. Laird

notes that some of the deficiencies are deficiencies of knowledge, deficiencies of practice, and deficiencies of execution. Deficiencies of execution cannot be solved by training.

Laird warned that it can be problematic to ask managers about their training needs. They will start believing that they can effectively determine these needs. Over time they will determine the need for training before the training and development specialist becomes involved. This is a losing situation because ultimately the manager will recommend training in an inappropriate situation. The training and development specialist will either need to talk the manager out of training or provide the ineffective training.

Laird wrote about the importance of prioritizing training needs or other performance solutions. Four criteria are proposed. These are cost effectiveness, legal requirements, executive pressure, and population. Measuring cost effectiveness requires that the financial difference be calculated between the desired situation and the current situation.

Legal requirement may simply dictate that certain performance standards must be met or training may even be explicitly required. Executive pressure should be considered when prioritizing training needs. Upper management support should be nurtured rather than ignored if possible. Finally, it may often be important to consider population. The size of the group may be important to the overall effectiveness of training efforts. A greater organization benefit may accrue when the audience is large.

Rossett (1987) proposed that a key question is whether managers are using training as an appropriate solution. Rossett wrote that training can be a solution where knowledge, skill, or motivation are lacking. Training will not solve problems caused by incentives or environment. Rossett referenced Mager and Pipe in this assertion. Mager and Pipe (1984) stated that if the trainee cannot do it even with a gun pointed to their head, then skill or knowledge is lacking. Training is not the solution if they could do it when forced.

William Edwards Deming was a strong supporter of training in organizations. He was specific about the need for appropriate training. He was also a strong advocate for other interventions to improve performance, primarily in manufacturing organizations. Scherkenbach (1986) wrote about W. E. Deming's fourteen points for improving quality and production. Two of Deming's fourteen points talk explicitly about the importance of training.

Scherkenbach made an insightful comment about how organizations choose solutions. He said "if the only tool you have is a hammer it is surprising how many things start looking like a nail." This seems at home in the context of needs analysis as Rossett, Sleezer, and others exhort practitioners not to presume training will solve yet undefined problems.

According to Clark (1994), W.E. Deming stated that 80% of quality problems are not due to lack of knowledge or skills. Spitzer (1990) also said that most quality problems are not due to lack of training and indicated the importance of not presupposing

that training will be part of the solution. If training is automatically part of the solution this may be inappropriate as often as 80% of the time.

Triner et al. (1996) wrote that efforts to find the best way to improve the quality or quantity of results should recognize that training is only useful to resolve gaps in knowledge, skills, abilities, or attitudes. If these types of gaps are identified in the needs assessment then a training requirements analysis should be performed. A trainer or manager might refer to this as a training needs assessment or they might have a broader performance analysis in mind. This article seeks to clarify terminology by defining training requirements analysis as an effort to develop appropriate training once the need for training is identified.

Zemke (1998) wrote about the challenges of determining the need for training when time is not available for thorough needs assessment. He encouraged readers to accept training requests before doing needs assessment and assess the problem on the fly. If the assessment indicates that training is not appropriate then the practitioner should negotiate for a different solution. Zemke counseled the reader to be prepared to back up their proposals with strong analysis and clear reasoning.

Elliott (1996) insisted that a rigorous analysis of performance must take place before appropriate solutions are selected. Areas comprising the systems within the scope of human performance technology are (1) selection and assignment of employees; (2) information, training, and documentation; (3) employee motivation and incentives; and

(4) the redesign of jobs, work processes, and work environments. Elliott included all four of these areas as valid targets for interventions to improve performance.

Levels of Need

Laird (1985) identified two classes of training needs. Macro training needs exist for large groups of people such as an entire job classification. Micro training needs exist for just one person or for very small groups. These different classes of needs are identified and resolved in different ways.

According to Kaufman (1994) different levels of need exist that should be considered during a needs assessment. Mega-level results are at the societal level. Macro-level results are organizational outputs. Micro-level results are individual or small group outputs.

The most powerful needs assessments will consider results at all three levels. Kaufman anticipates some resistance to the consideration of mega-level results. His argument references Drucker (1992) and states that "Societal concerns and payoffs are vital for organizational survival and successes." In addition he states "If your organization does not intend for everything it uses, does, and delivers to be useful to both the client and our shared society, it will predictably fail."

Triner et al. (1996) wrote that three types of results should be considered. These three types are Mega, Macro, and Micro. Mega results are results at the societal level. Macro results encompass the organization's outputs to its external clients and society.

Micro results are products of the systems within the organization. The micro results are the building blocks of the organizational outputs.

There seems to be general agreement in the literature that Micro and Macro needs are important results to the needs assessment process. More recent literature proposes that societal concerns are important considerations. The case is made by several authors that Mega-level results should be incorporated into the objectives of effective needs assessment.

Desired results should not just include the results achieved by individuals and groups. Important results also exist at the macro or organizational level. Needs assessment can identify gaps between actual and optimal results for the organization. Mega-level results consider the effect on society in a broader context beyond the needs of the organization. Mega-level results can be important benefits to organizational stakeholders.

Instructional Design

Sleezer (1993) wrote about the proper role played by needs analysis in the workplace. She prefaced her discussion by noting that training is a favorite performance improvement tool for management. According to Sleezer, the general model for designing the training component of a performance solution is a five phase approach:

1. Assess the needs.
2. Design the training.
3. Develop the materials and instruction.
4. Implement the training.

5. Evaluate the training.

Sleezer says that needs assessment is the first and most important step in developing the training component of a performance solution. To complicate matters a little, needs assessment (or analysis) becomes a component of the instructional design model. A needs assessment that indicates no need for training should eject out of the instructional design model if training is not needed.

Triner et al. (1996) also discussed the classic model for instructional system design referred to with the acronym ADDIE. They indicate that ADDIE stands for Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate. This is slightly different terminology than Sleezer has used. Since ADDIE is a model for instructional systems design, its use as a needs assessment framework would presuppose the need for instruction. This would not be appropriate if there are no gaps in skills, knowledge, abilities, or attitudes.

ADDIE is a generally accepted framework for instructional design. The appropriate sequence of events through this framework begins with an examination of needs. This process is generally presented as an iterative process wherein the last step, Evaluation, leads back to the first step for another iteration. It may be appropriate to leave the process after one or more iterations after the Analyze or Assessment phase rather than the Evaluate phase.

Summary of Literature Review

Various authors (Rossett, 1987; Scherkenbach, 1986; Spitzer, 1990; Triner et al., 1996; Zemke, 1998) wrote that a needs assessment which presupposes training as a

solution is flawed. Training is one tool in a repertoire of interventions that can be utilized to improve performance in organizations. Frequently managers approach trainers or performance technologists with requests for training. Practitioners are cautioned that the manager may have jumped to conclusions. It is presumed that the manager is not equipped judge whether training is an appropriate solution.

Several recent management and organizational behavior textbooks (Dailey, 1988; Kreitner & Kinicki, 1992; Thompson & Strickland, 1990) were reviewed. The texts were for both undergraduate business administration and MBA programs. No information was found to indicate how a manager might determine the need for training or implement a training program. The review of literature indicates that the training and performance technology professions are encouraged to adopt a philosophy that is open-minded about a wide array of performance interventions.

Performance problems involving quality, quantity, new processes, and the adoption of new technologies may be addressed by training but a proper needs assessment should be done. The knowledge, skills, and abilities may already be possessed by the trainees. Needs assessment will indicate whether there are gaps that can be resolved by training.

The literature provides reasoning that advocates needs assessment as good preparation for an effective intervention. It is often noted that there is organizational resistance to needs assessment. This resistance might better be characterized as a need for some cost justification or analysis of the return on investment.

The prevailing model for instructional design is the ADDIE model. The literature put this model in perspective by noting it is useful only after a need for training is identified. ADDIE is not described as a framework for needs assessment.

Related Research

A thesis by Rowell (1990) concluded that a need for training existed at American Express for their widely used electronic mail and data distribution system. The study used a complete needs assessment prior to defining the objectives for training. Elements of this needs assessment included observation, one-on-one interviews, phone surveys, and extant data analysis of help desk calls. In addition, subject matter experts were consulted.

The ADDIE model was used to design instruction. Measures were taken for both reaction and learning. For measurement of learning, post-test was compared to a pre-test that was administered to the twenty-one participants. An attitude survey was administered to measure the reaction of the learners.

Rowell concluded that the resulting training was successful. Statistical measures indicated that stated objectives were achieved. It was noted that after training it became clear that there needed to be more emphasis on psychomotor skills and less on cognitive skills. The study specifically recommended a modification of the pre-test in order to assess the relative need for psychomotor skill and cognitive skills.

Rodriguez (1993) undertook a field study of the working philosophies of adult education practitioners in corporate training. Rodriguez used qualitative research methods to gather information through interviews, observations, and document analysis.

She compared and contrasted two environments where adults are trained. A large insurance and financial services company and a department of probation officers were studied and compared. Findings indicated that trainers in both settings exhibited common practices of good adult education including learner participation, respect for the learner, and the value of learner experience. Needs assessment activities, however, were driven by particularities of the setting. The economy was a major factor in the company as it exerted financial forces within the organization. The department as a public agency was influenced greatly by socio-cultural factors in its charge to serve the public interest.

Trainers in each of the two environments studied were greatly influenced in practice by the environmental factors that acted upon their organizations. Rodriguez recommends that practitioners can enhance the available knowledge in the field if they are able to publish their findings. She strongly recommended academic researchers become more involved in the practice of adult education.

Carder's (1993) dissertation studied the factors that lead companies to train their employees. This quantitative study examined manufacturing companies in Arkansas. Carder's analysis of the survey results found that the critical factors of influence were ranked as follows.

1. To improve quality.
2. Competition.
3. Technology changes
4. Customer requirements.
5. Government regulations.
6. Production problems.
7. Product expansion.

8. Employee benefits.
9. Employee suggestions.
10. Poor safety record.

Csete (1994) did a qualitative study of needs assessment for her doctoral dissertation. She did a comprehensive review of literature and found that little actual research exists regarding the needs assessment process. Her review of the literature did find the following:

1. A general description of needs assessment and its evolution.
2. A detailed look at the process and terminology of needs assessment to illustrate unclear and contested components.
3. Various definitions of “need.”
4. An examination of how the process and results are influenced by the people conducting needs assessments.
5. A clear indication that research on the applied process of needs assessment would be valuable.

Csete also observed that very little research exists to test the reliability or validity of needs assessment practices. She notes that much of the literature is insightful and loaded with valuable observations based on experiences but not based on actual research.

Csete subtitled her study as “The gulf between theory and practice” and she did indicate that there are significant differences between what is suggested in the literature and actual practice. The purpose of her study was to “generate insights on how people conduct needs assessment and what they learn from them.”

She concentrated on how novices performed needs assessment and their results. Csete’s novices were fourteen physicians charged with performing a needs assessment in

preparation for creating a medical curriculum. She reached following conclusions in her study.

1. The procedures described in the literature are different from those carried out in the real world.
2. The literature and formal training concentrated on the ideal rather than a comprehensive set of practical procedures that could be used to cope with constraints in real settings.
3. The benefits perceived by the participants differed in real settings.
4. The results were not as change stimulating as suggested in the literature.

Csete concluded that there is a gap between the optimal practices suggested by the literature and actual practice. Although literature and formal training defines ideals, organizational resistance and time constraints prevent thorough needs assessment from being utilized.

Rothwell (1996) undertook a survey to assess training needs assessment practices. The survey was designed to find out what job categories are more frequent targets of training needs assessment, what methods are most frequently used, and what methods are perceived as effective. The survey also was designed to find what are the biggest perceived problems and biggest advantages for organizations conducting training needs assessment.

A random sample of 350 members of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) was chosen to receive surveys. A low response rate of 11.7% was achieved. Questions regarding the biggest problems and advantages of training needs assessment requested freeform responses. The low response rate and the fact that all

respondents were within the membership of ASTD make it inappropriate to generalize the results of this study beyond the respondents.

Rothwell concluded that the biggest perceived problems faced by organizations in conducting training needs assessments were lack of time, lack of staff, and lack of expertise. Biggest advantages gained by these organizations were time-savings, cost-savings, and proper identification of training requirements.

It is quite interesting to note that the advantages seem to match the disadvantage on an item-by-item basis. In other words “lack of time” is cited as a problem while “time savings” is an often cited advantage. Perhaps the time savings is achieved by different individuals than those that lack time but the resources presumably belong to the same organization.

The problem of “lack of staff” may be counterbalanced by the advantage of “cost savings.” The problem of “lack of expertise” may be alleviated by the “proper identification of training requirements.” Not enough information is available here to determine whether the magnitude of the advantages is enough to offset the problems that obstruct training needs assessment.

These research studies provide insight on the contrasts between theory and practice with regard to needs assessment. Rowell was able to apply needs assessment successfully. She followed the framework outlined by Rossett (1987). Her needs assessment preceded her use of the ADDIE framework for instructional design

Chapter 3 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Methods

This is a qualitative study of training issues in the workplace. Qualitative research is difficult because it is more natural for many of us to try to reach conclusions based on quantitative methods. It is a common tendency to think in terms of quantifiable results rather than the subjective.

A quantitative study is often quite useful to support or test a particular hypothesis. Studies or research projects that are quantitative in nature use statistical methods to reach a conclusion or fail to reach a conclusion. Such conclusions might have measurable reliability and therefore have validity within the same context as the research.

This is an inductive case study of a small selection of individuals with a single organization. This study does not rely on any statistical analysis but instead derives its results from a descriptive account of relevant activities. A specific hypothesis has not been tested. Real situations were examined to document the existence of phenomena related to the purpose of this study.

Most often when we think of valid and reliable research, we think of scientific study and when we think of scientific study we think of quantitative research. There are

phenomena to study that cannot be analyzed quantitatively. Control groups cannot be established for many subjective problems. Results cannot be compared because consistent situations are not available for comparison. Results are influenced by a wide selection of variables so there is little hope of holding all but one or two variables constant.

Complex social interactions cannot be replicated in a laboratory environment. This study could not be repeated in exactly the same context. As such, overall results would change. Even with the same researcher, different levels of insight would cause a difference in perception. Professionals working on training and development or human performance technology are constantly presented with challenges within multifaceted contexts or complex systems.

The work of Merriam (1988) and Briton (1996) has been used as guidance for the design of this research. Merriam (1988) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) have been the source of reasonable criteria to evaluate this qualitative research.

Criteria for Evaluation

In quantitative analysis, the trustworthiness of the research is derived using the concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest different criteria for qualitative research. Credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability are used here as criteria for evaluation.

Qualitative case study has the potential to provide a rich description of the issues confronted. There can be more depth in a qualitative study. One goal is to provide

relevant findings that can be practically employed. Another goal is to suggest areas for additional research. Qualitative research does not lead to certainties but can be employed to search for appropriate questions.

Credibility is a measure of the truth value of the findings.. Internal validity or credibility of this study rests on triangulation. Descriptive accounts provided by interviews can be corroborated by written records of the programs described. These accounts can also be corroborated by other interview subjects. In some cases the mere existence of a phenomena may be a finding.

Confirmability is very dependent on the effectiveness of the researcher. The research is a very integral part of this type of study. In qualitative research the researcher has to be involved and interact with the participants rather than be a detached reporter. The following is a description provided by me as the researcher so that the reader can better understand the researcher's perspective.

In regards to my role of researcher, I have to clarify my biases. At the time of this study I had been an employee of the Principal Financial Group for five years. My responsibilities have evolved from training, to business analysis, systems analysis and performance technology.

None of the interviewees are from my department. A small amount of direct interaction has taken place with three of the interviewees prior to the study. Prior to the study, I was acquainted with four of the interviewees. The other participants were referred by friends and acquaintances at the Principal.

I was not a participant, leader, consultant, or designer of any of the training programs discussed. None of the training or development programs were implemented within my department or areas of responsibility. I have, however, taken numerous classroom and computer based training courses at the Principal. In addition, I have prepared, delivered, and provided consultation on training efforts within my own department.

The objectives of most of the programs described activities similar to activities in my own area. Some of the job functions discussed were quite similar to job functions in my own department. One particular project discussed involved the same group of customers served by my department.

This familiarity suggests certain conclusions about my activities and reporting of the results. Sleezer talks about the contrast between internal needs assessment consultants and external needs assessment consultants. Some of the limitations faced by the internal consultant are probably shared by me in this study. My access to information and familiarity with the organization is greater than it would be if I were an outsider. Power, politics, or lack of anonymity can cause me to avoid certain issues or activities. An outsider might have a clearer perception of organizational culture. An outsider might also have a fresher perspective on the typicalities or uniqueness of the organization.

Transferability is the applicability of the research. The very nature of qualitative research is to examine the varied details of situations that occur in the uncontrolled real

world. The same concept of external validity that is strived for in quantitative research cannot be found in this type of qualitative research. Instead there should be some degree of transferability. Transferability can be achieved when the reader can determine from a carefully described context whether their target context is the same.

This is an in-depth account of situations occurring in a context that is probably not widely duplicated. However the reader may be confronted with situations in sufficiently similar contexts where generalization is appropriate. To this end, a thorough description of context has been provided in which the issues have been studied. A richer description makes it easier for the reader to determine applicability to the situations they face.

In this study, dependability is substituted for reliability. In a quantitative study the appropriate setting can usually be clearly defined. Qualitative research takes place in a naturalistic perspective. Conclusions are dependent on results that occur in complex situations. The context in which similar results are expected must be sufficiently similar to the context in which this qualitative study was done.

Qualitative research in this case and others often examines processes. While the reader may not encounter the same context as this study they may encounter situations where they might consider a similar process and be expecting similar results. Additional research may be found or undertaken to study elements of the process that are measurable on a quantitative basis.

It is not practical to expect that many readers will encounter situations sufficiently similar to predict identical conclusions. This qualitative study does, however, provide value in another way by suggesting a previously used path through issues that will occur in other situations. The reader needs to exercise some judgment as to the similarity of the situations they encounter.

Limitations

There are several limitations that should be noted regarding the applicability of this study. First there are two limitations with regard to the setting and context of the study.

1. This is a study within a single organization. To the extent that other organizations have different characteristics their activities and results may vary. The activities found in the context of this study might not be present in other organizations. Events might unfold quite differently in another organizational culture
2. This organization is a member of the insurance and financial services industry. This is an industry with a heavy emphasis on producing information and services for its customers. Another industry engaged in different activities such as manufacturing might not find the same value in performing needs assessment activities.

There are four noteworthy limitations regarding the qualitative methods of this study.

1. Only a few members of a single organization are participants in this study. Their behaviors and activities should not be construed as representative of other members in the same or other organizations.
2. The results of this study cannot be tested by statistical methods. Criteria more appropriate to qualitative methods should be applied as discussed later in this section.
3. This study relies heavily on recollection. Participants are asked for their recollection of events not necessarily current. The researcher desired to examine events of significance while perhaps sacrificing some higher level of recall that might be achieved for recent events of less importance.
4. A single researcher is the primary investigation instrument.. This study is highly dependent on the abilities and credibility of the researcher.

Setting and Context

This effort studied the current state of workplace training and development at the Principal Financial Group. This is a large company with approximately 17,000 employees. All of the interviews were done with employees of the Principal.

The Principal was a relatively free of obstacles to training and development endeavors. There was a wide variety of resources available when training needs arise. There was both a corporate training department and an information systems training department. In addition, several subsidiaries and departments had their own trainers.

A large number of classroom courses were regularly scheduled. At least forty-seven courses were available from the corporate training department. Over one hundred courses were available from the information technology department on a variety of technical topics.

Computer based training courses are widely used and available for many different topics. Over 190 computer based training courses were offered. General topics included Orientation, Management, Productivity, Accounting, and Computer Applications.

All new employees were sent through structured orientation activities which included a variety of training activities and delivery methods. Curriculums were established for specific departments, positions, and job functions. Prerequisites were established within and between classroom courses and computer based training. Most of the computer based training was available on the desktops of the employees.

Interviews

Six decision-makers at the Principal Financial Group were interviewed. Mid-level managers or trainers were chosen. Within the group, none had more than ten years of employment with the Principal and all had at least three years. Each one was interviewed and taped individually in sessions lasting about forty minutes each.

Taping was discussed before interviews began. It was very important that the process of taping did not limit candor or cause any unnecessary embellishment. The interviewees were promised a degree of confidentiality so they would not be inhibited from responding because of any expected negative ramifications. If the participants had

concerns that they might have to defend their past actions they might not have been as candid. During the research process each participant was assured that their identity would not be part of this paper or associated with their responses. In order to add an extra measure of confidentiality the researcher has personally transcribed these interviews and assured the participants that a transcriber would not be employed to listen to the tapes.

The interviews began with a general outline of the line of inquiry. Interviewees were asked for a description of their job function and responsibilities as well as the job functions and responsibilities of their subordinates or trainees. It was particularly important to understand the activities, motivations, and interventions of the participants. Much of the interview was unstructured. Questions framed in advance could encourage responses that reflected the question's implied result. An understanding of the actions and the thought processes was deemed more important than a search for the presence of pre-ordained elements.

The researcher asked each interviewee to describe a recent training or development effort that has been successful. This gives them an opportunity to reflect on their successes and recollect the things they believe led to success. During these descriptive accounts questions were interjected to find out the reasons for various decisions.

The line of inquiry followed a path of critical incidence analysis. This was useful for several reasons. Critical incidence analysis seeks out general narratives of successes and failures. These were quite easy for the interviewees to recollect. The general nature

of the initial inquiry allows an uninhibited rich description. When this process uncovered some differences between successful endeavors and unsuccessful endeavors the interviewee was generally willing to provide their insight into the causes.

After a thorough discussion of a successful project the interviewees were asked for a description about a project with less satisfactory results. It was stressed that this does not have to be one of their own projects. The intention was to avoid any defensiveness or desperate attempts to justify actions that might cause discomfort to disclose. Questions were asked to identify the perceived reasons behind unsuccessful endeavors. These questions were framed to elicit constructive criticism of the unsuccessful endeavors. This was done gradually and in a non-threatening manner.

Bad memories of an unsuccessful project could add an emotional charge to the situation that interferes with an open and descriptive account. There should be both positive and negative perceptions in the interviewees' accounts. Questioning was unstructured and informal to minimize discomfort that might prevent interviewees from openly discussing their experiences.

Documentation

In addition to the interviews, available documentation was reviewed. Descriptions of training programs and facts about the organization supported conclusion and provide a backdrop for findings. A number of employee development plans have been examined to verify intentions of leaders and their subordinates.

Course materials have been obtained from interviewees and other members of their departments. Brochures and course listings have been obtained from the company. Training plans and curriculums have also been obtained. These materials were useful to corroborate findings based on interviews and literature review.

Participants

The following is a brief description of the participants in the study. These subjects were chosen because their roles in the organization included responsibilities to see that other staff members received appropriate training and development.. Most are managers. Within this organizations, managers are expected to identify the need for training and request training for their staff.

H worked in a telemarketing area as a manager. This department was known as the Retirement Benefits Unit. The staff in H's area was primarily responsible for telecommunications with existing customers. Their primary objective was retaining the customer.

M was a manager working in a systems development department. The department was rather large and was made up of programmers, systems analysts, computer hardware specialists, and other computer specialists. The department had at least 6 other managers all reporting to an officer in charge of the department. Systems development work was in high demand. Job security was definitely not a problem in this area. One of the biggest challenges in this area was employee retention. There was an industry-wide shortage of programmers and systems analysts.

S was working in an area that marketed group employee benefits to employers. Group employee benefits included such things as health insurance, life insurance, and pension plans. S was a trainer responsible for most of the first year training and some of the subsequent training for field representatives that called on employers. Field representative work involved sales and service. They were compensated primarily by sales commissions.

C was working in a telemarketing area and worked with other departments that utilized the telemarketing area to integrate their telemarketing needs into the department's activities. The telemarketers handled calls from customers that dealt with a wide variety of topics. The basic skills of these telemarketers included the ability to provide customer service and product marketing on the phone. Some of the telemarketers had to develop new product expertise whenever the department took on more telemarketing duties

T was a manager of six people and took responsibility for their training and development needs. The department worked as a team to do valuations of investment assets. This department identified about fifty individuals in other areas of the company as their internal customers.

L was a manager of a small research department. Her staff members studied potential marketing opportunities and watched the activities of competitors. Research involved a lot of reading and some analysis. The members of this group did most of their work by themselves with little direction.

Chapter 4 DISCUSSION

Telemarketing Securities

H's department, Retention Benefits, started a major initiative to increase the sales ability of their staff. This group of telemarketers were responsible for selling securities over the telephone. The driving force behind the initiative was that the yearly sales goal was not going to be met.

Calls were declining and sales per call were declining as well. It became apparent that a lot of opportunities were being missed. The percentage of sales per call needed to be increased.

Qualitative assessment revealed that telemarketers were merely using their product knowledge to drive sales. There were no well developed sales techniques in use. Typically a current customer would call to convert an asset and the telemarketer would make sure they adequately described the available options. The emphasis was to have a thorough knowledge of product features and options but no effort was made to influence or persuade the customer.

The demonstration piece of the sales process was present but nothing else. Telemarketers had a good understanding of the products they were offering but were not

accustomed to moving beyond product description. Sales were initiated by the customer rather than the telemarketer. Thirty people needed to adopt a more comprehensive sales technique. An early concern was that one approach would not work for everyone. A specific sales techniques might work for one person in one situation but not another. A meaningful framework was needed so that the telemarketer could customize their approach to fit their personality and the customer needs. Successful sales people may have a few things in common but their approaches tend to be reflections of their personality. This suggested that for the thirty people to be successful they would each need to find their ideal techniques. This was expected to be a challenge.

This project was particularly challenging because there really was no one available that was experienced at training telemarketers to sell securities. It became apparent that a totally new way of doing business was required. Product based selling would be replaced by needs based selling. What initially seemed like a project to change the things telemarketers said on the phone became a major initiative.

Management looked at some available training programs that covered the fundamentals of the sales process. They were unable to find a suitable program that had been prepared for telemarketing securities. They decided to modify an in-house program known as "Integrity Selling."

They decided that there was a fundamental sales process. They did not script the process but a road map was provided so it was clear which direction to go. It was even acknowledged that the customers have their own unique responses.

Regarding performance standards, the requirement was that at least they had to try the sales process when it was appropriate. It could have been quite a challenge to mandate specific outcomes without undermining the existing incentives and motivation.

One existing staff member was promoted to trainer. H wanted someone that really understood the product. A program was developed in three major stages. First the sales process was defined as having eight major steps. Sales module one covered opening the call and taking control of the call and begin the needs based approach. An assessment was done on those people and the trainer worked with each one on an individual basis. A workstation was set up in a conference room. Feedback was delivered in a safe environment designed to avoid any fear or recrimination.

The other training modules were successive parts of the sales process. The staff was divided into groups of six. After the class they spent about an hour focusing on the just completed training. They considered how it was effective, how it could be better, what to focus on more, what to cover less, and what they thought their peers needed. Sometimes the needs for peers were different than H expected. Each of these feedback sessions was reviewed and used to improve the subsequent sessions. The first groups were filled from the most experienced and effective counselors. Their reactions and feedback were utilized to make the training more effective for the subsequent and less seasoned telemarketers.

This training process caused turnover to go up a little. This was anticipated before the training began. The job changed in that the counselors needed to be more

proactive and became responsible for the sales results. For those that remained and succeeded their jobs become more rewarding because the sales process worked. Once an individual turned the corner and realized some results the ball would be rolling. Good results would lead to more good results because positive attitude is big success factor.

Production results were expected to be ten percent below goal but instead the department was thirty percent over the goal. Approximately \$100,000,000 of sales increase. When costs and benefits were considered a benchmark on one additional sale per hour became the break-even goal. The training process would pay for itself but it was pretty difficult to arrive at the actual dollar cost. The program continued to evolve to a new employee or beginner program.

Documentation of the sales class introduced the class as a modification of the company's "Integrity Selling" course. It is noted that the intention is "to take the skills learned in 'Integrity Selling' and learn to apply those to the daily functions in Retention Benefits." The four modules started with "Opening the Call." The other three modules were "Mirroring the Call", "Identifying Buying Styles", and "Entering into the Sale."

The objectives listed in the course catalog for the Integrity Selling course for Retention Benefits were a subset of the objectives listed in the Integrity Selling course for all employees. The audience for the Retention Benefit course was described as "all licensed counselors." The audience for the more general course was "all employees."

Systems Staff Development

M described several successful techniques that she has employed to increase staff development. M was responsible for a team of six to seven employees. As one example of success, M described the mentoring program for new staff members. M said mentoring was used because this was suggested by other managers as a way to increase comfort level and promote a team orientation. It reduced the reluctance to ask questions.

The Systems area oriented new employees by first assigning them to a mentor. The mentor was someone who worked with many of the same processes and had been with the company for a while. It was important to help new staff members become familiar with the company, provide personal help, and promote their sense of belonging. Mentoring was an effective way to improve the comfort level of new systems employees. This became a standard procedure for new staff members.

Another challenge for M was new projects that required skill sets not present within her staff. For these new projects, M looked for individuals that were curious and willing to learn. They needed to have confidence and good project track record. M found that it was effective for programmers learning a new tool or language to read the literature, explore their comfort level, do their own hands-on project, and return to their co-workers for advice and evaluation.

M and other systems leaders are often faced with this challenge of learning new ways to program. M believed they have had good success learning new tools quickly when the learner started by reading the handbook and studied the new programming

language. They then engaged in a little practice on simple programming exercises to give them the background to take on substantial projects.

Vendor seminars and vendor-supplied training were effective to present some new ideas and propose new solutions to deal with problems. Unfortunately there were problems with employee retention and the ability to apply this training to everyday work. More depth was needed to effectively utilize new programming tools.

New skill development activities increased job satisfaction and were sometimes perceived as a reward. Some employees desired to learn new languages but this was not done until there was an imminent need for the skill. Learning retention was often lost if the training is done too early. Time was too precious for on-the-job training.

In addition to programming skills, Programmers were expected to develop their time management skills, project management skills, methodology skills, creativity, and stay abreast of the latest technology. New employees were sent to corporate classes such as "Customer Service", "Franklin Planner", "Project Management", and "Time Management" to provide a good foundation of time management and project management skills.

M also described a recent effort to improve a process normally handled by one person. The team took a close look at this one process, discussed and analyzed this for problems. When this one person was unavailable it was very difficult for others to step in and handle the process. M also considered providing more written expectations. Certain responsibilities such as on call times need to be documented so this is easier to learn.

Materials were obtained relating to Franklin Time Management, Project Management, and Customer Service. M was able to furnish a forty-nine page training plan for new employees in her area. This plan does reference Project Management and the Customer Service courses as parts of the training plan.

Field Representative Training

S trained sales and service representatives on retirement products. Groups of fifteen to twenty-five sales representative traveled to the home office for approximately one a week of training at five different times during their first year of work.

After their first year of employment the representatives would gather in the home office for an annual meeting that provided their ongoing training. This also consisted of five to seven days of activities. S was responsible for defining the curriculum, course development, homework assignments, review sessions, and the preparation of the training rooms for all of these programs.

The biggest change that S implemented since she was put in charge was a reduction in duration for the training programs from seven days to five days. This reduced the expense of the program but also limited the amount of time available for training. S felt the deciding issue was that this reduction alleviated the need for trainees to stay over a weekend. She found that some hardships were greatly reduced by compressing the activities so that weekends did not need to be spent away from home. Trainees were not happy about investing a weekend in order to be available for the last two days of training.

S developed the curriculum for her programs but did not have to develop these from scratch since the programs already existed. S solicited and received feedback from the field managers and her boss. An ongoing feedback process was not formalized but did exist as feedback gathered informally. Generally S would present new ideas to the field managers to solicit their feedback.

Topics for the new rep school included the retirement product characteristics, service characteristics, broker compensation, products availability, legislative items, and regulations. Some sales training was done but the local offices handled most of the sales training. Local office sales training generally consisted of pairing new representatives with experienced representatives on sales calls.

S described one successful endeavor which was the advanced pension school. It seemed to S that the participants were really with it and meeting the objectives. This program was presented to experienced representatives. Some actual scenarios or case studies were handled and these were well received and effective. At earlier stages in the sales representative's career there would not have been enough knowledge to handle these complex scenarios but at this stage when their knowledge had increased this training was very effective.

An effective and popular activity utilized three people from the field to come in and present some of the training. This worked extremely well. It was expensive but the field experts were able to work well with their peers.

S took several trips to the field to observe and remain familiar with the actual activities performed in the field. This also provided some opportunities to see the results of her training. S was quite busy. This and the expense of travel severely limited her opportunities to visit the field. She did indicate that the few visits she made helped have a better understanding of the needs of trainees. She wanted to do more of these trips if the opportunity arose.

S has provided a training model along with objectives, schedules, and descriptions of the Employee Benefits and Pension Schools.

Telecommunication Services

C worked as a leading project manager in a telecommunications department. C had two project managers reporting to him. The telecommunications unit handled a wide variety of calls for different areas of the company. Life insurance, mutual funds, retirement, and mortgages were some of the various products handled. The telecommunications department was often asked to provide their services for business areas with too many phone calls on somewhat narrow topics.

C and the project managers reporting to him were responsible for integrating new services requested by the business units into the workflow of the telecommunications counselors. C or one of his project managers would meet with a business area interested in their services. As an example, an assignment might be to take calls from potential mortgage customers and advise them on the next steps to take to apply for a mortgage.

For this example the counselors would need some basic knowledge of the mortgage application process.

When a new service was requested by a business unit, C or one of his project managers would be responsible for a variety of activities. The business needs for the service would be defined, staffing assignments or additions would be considered, computer screens might be modified, job aids would be developed, and training would be planned and delivered.

C and his project managers were responsible for all of these activities. They divided their work by business area rather than by the various job functions. Each project manager could become more familiar with their business constituents over time. They were responsible for a wide variety of activities needed to add a new telecommunications service. C mentioned that one of the biggest challenges was meeting the initial expectations that were sold to the business unit managers. The business units often presented quite challenging assignments.

C described a successful service activity. The project was an effort to get employees of the Principal Financial Group to participate in the 401(k) retirement program. Prior to this project the counselors were primarily involved in service functions. In other words they were reacting to customer requests for forms or information. This project was not so passive. Outgoing calls would be made to encourage participation in the 401(k) retirement plan. Sales skills were needed and it was also decided that there would be some competitive incentives for successful counselors.

Training was provided to provide the counselors some sales skills. There was also some basic product training specific to this project. Systems were developed for the project and these were available during the training to facilitate role playing. The objectives of the outgoing calls were very clear. Success was measured by the percentage participation in the plan before and during the campaign.

In C's example of a successful project he identified training as important to fill the gap caused by a lack of sales skills. Incentives were deemed to be important but were carefully implemented to avoid ill feelings that might be associated with the more competitive environment.

Underwriting Department

T worked as a manager in an underwriting department. Underwriters were responsible for analyzing cash flows and making proper valuations of complex assets. The underwriters worked independently and were assigned to small teams. They were expected to make valuation decisions by applying a consistent set of criteria to an inconsistent assortment of assets.

T described a training project that was implemented successfully. This was a major project to integrate some new underwriting software into the usual underwriting workflow. Special training sessions were set up and teams were sent to this training. Team leaders were involved in the testing and received extra training in advance so they could serve as a resource after training.

The underwriters were divided into groups. Leaders were chosen based on their interest, expertise, and availability. T was one of these leaders. She found that it was important for her to put the new software and underwriting procedures into perspective. She also was careful to make sure that underwriters understood that their analysis skills were still important. The critical issue was for the underwriters to take the system generated results and adjust these based on their insight and analysis. Underwriters had been accustomed to completing their work without a complex tool for a baseline analysis.

After implementation the underwriters still needed to handle the qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis was handled by the new software. Change was met with reactions ranging from a positive outlook that change is often an improvement to a lack of understanding why the change was necessary. An open exchange of feedback and ideas was encouraged throughout implementation. A lot of personal attention was given to the underwriters to help them adapt to the new workflow.

Training materials were produced especially for this workflow change. Among other things the training documented specific differences between the old and the new system. A step by step guide was also part of the materials.

T also talked about a program that did not go so well. This new transaction was not as easy as expected. The new transaction had a lot of problems that were not anticipated. Not enough testing was done. Not enough “what if” questions were asked. T believes more questions should have been asked ahead of time. A step-by-step set of instructions was provided that looked good, however once people tried to use these steps

it became apparent that it was not working. An outside party was asked to provide some training. A very small amount of time was allotted for the program.

T's area did have a core training program for new employees. T and other leaders were the instructors. They had a short program they offered to groups of six employees. Later these employees could progress to an intensive two week program. In addition they had a policies, practices, and procedures manual that they maintain as a reference. This reference was used during the training and then serves as a reference on the job.

T thought training was not one of her strong points. She worked with other leaders to train new employees on items specific to her area. She expressed that it was particularly important solicit and give feedback. When training underwriters, T avoided role playing and instead has the new underwriters accompany seasoned underwriters on their travels. Many of her training activities were based on or affected by the feedback she receives.

The company encouraged managers and their employees to develop written plans for their development. Special forms, guidelines, and instructions are available and plans could be formally documented. T worked with her staff on their development plans. None chose to do a formal development plan. Instead the development plans grew out of the results of their annual performance appraisals. Even so, the staff general drove their own development needs.

Management encouraged the staff to decide their own needs with some input based on the performance appraisals or other situations. Written employee development

plans show goals that have been agreed upon by employees and their supervisors. These plans are centered around goals and include activities, support/reinforcement needs, target dates, and evaluation plans.

It was T's opinion that leaders would benefit from more management development. She was aware of two courses in leadership development but believed there should be some more informal activities. She hoped the company would do a better job of working with leaders like her on how to address training needs but she did feel the company placed a healthy emphasis on training.

Research Department

L worked as a manager in a research department. The research work was very individualized. A lot of reading was required. The work was not repetitive except that generally the same publications were referenced each time new issues arise. The department did not have very many routine tasks.

Staff members had their own unique responsibilities that they handled with a minimum of supervision. It was understood that individuals needed to be self motivated. New employees were expected to sign up for insurance industry exams and to attend market research seminars

L saw a high degree of emphasis on training at the Principal Financial Group. L thought there was an enormous number of training opportunities. She formerly worked for a couple of firms in a consulting environment. This was the first firm she worked for

with its own training department. L observed fewer opportunities for training in smaller firms.

Most of the training she received had been chosen by herself. She indicated this is also mostly true for her subordinates. Occasionally she would recommend some particular class or training in response to a need identified in a performance appraisal or elsewhere.

L claimed she had rarely refused requests for training. She indicated that once she had but it was after careful consideration of the situation. The employee was interested in a leadership development course designed for managers. This employee was not a manager and was not expected to be a manager in the near future. L visited with the instructor and determined the course was most useful if delivered within six months of the expected utilization of skills presented in the course. Since this employee was not likely to be a manager in this time frame, L declined to enroll the employee.

L believed that training was most effective when the trainee could see an immediate result. Software training was offered to the secretarial staff. The trainees were able to employ their new skills right away. This was evidence of the value to both the employee and the manager.

Besides technical training, L found that a couple of other courses were very effective. "Assertive Image" was a good class for building self confidence and eliminating timidity and fear. All of her staff were sent to the "Effective Presentations" even if their responsibilities did not include making presentations. Even though they

might not have to deliver any speeches it was useful to help them speak up in meetings. This class was good for increasing the confidence level of trainees.

For outside training L recommended Tom Peters seminars. She found that these were quite beneficial for her staff. The events were generally offered to high level executives but her area allowed all levels to attend. L stated that these were quite effective and motivational events.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

The following research questions were raised in the introduction. Does the latest knowledge about needs assessment within the training and development profession contrast with actual practices in the organization? Is this same knowledge utilized by managers and others making training decisions in the workplace? Do managers have their own body of knowledge that is unappreciated by the training and development professional? Is there a practical body of thought that determines when training will be performed in the organization? If managers are the current, predominant, and enduring occupation that causes training, then what techniques to determine training needs have evolved in their domain? Do any of these suggest matters that training and development professionals should address?

Telemarketing Securities

The impetus for change in the department charged with telemarketing securities was a sales goal that was not going to be met. This might be considered a rather arbitrary precursor for training but management believed in its importance. Failure to meet sales goals could endanger the survival of the department.

Before deciding on training as a solution, managers had met to decide what should be done to meet the sales goal. H believed that before choosing a training solution it was important to get several people together. This is consistent with Rossett's groups tool. A variety of viewpoints could provide a diverse set of ideas. Management determined that since no sales techniques were in operation, training was probably needed. Management assessed their staff and found that the skills were not present.

In this way, some effort was made to determine current skills and knowledge. Even though the managers recognized that their staff had not been assigned to sales activities, they still made an effort to determine what skills already existed. They might have just skipped this step and simply concluded that no sales knowledge existed. Management also realized that they were dramatically changing the focus of the telemarketing job so that there might be a great deal of discomfort. They anticipated that some of the staff might be inclined to leave the department. Management wanted to minimize staff turnover. A flexible approach was taken to accommodate the different personalities of the staff.

The program outline was a modification of an existing sales program borrowed from another area of the company. The existing program was designed for face-to-face sales of insurance and other financial services. The modifications were made based on both the existing knowledge of the staff and the differences between the telemarketing sales and face-to-face sales.

H was able to describe this endeavor with a surprising amount of detail. Success factors included participant feedback, involvement, and planning. H and his coworkers employed many of the tools and techniques that would be used in a textbook implementation of needs assessment. All of the techniques of Rossett's framework for needs assessment; extant data analysis, opinion seeking, and subject matter analysis were employed. Tools utilized interviews, observations, and groups.

H and the other managers were not professional trainers and their only trainer was a telemarketer chosen to be a trainer. Even so, they were capable of taking a systematic and thoughtful approach to solving a departmental performance problem. This turned out to be a successful effort. The sales goal was met and exceeded by a substantial amount. Prior to their efforts to change the sales goal seemed unattainable.

It is particularly noteworthy that the impetus for this training was the sales goal. There was no questions that this was desirable at the organizational level. This was a great organizational factor to provide impetus for success. Rodriguez (1993) found problems in her studies of practitioners where the goals of training were not clearly linked to organizational goals. In this case there would be no doubt in the minds of the trainees, trainer, and managers that the objectives of the training were also desired by the organization.

H's area engaged in activities quite consistent with activities suggested by the training and development profession. No glaring contrast was found and activities seemed to parallel the activities proposed by Rossett and echoed by other authors. H

worked as a manager and was not a member of the training and development profession. It is not known whether H might have picked up some of these techniques from someone within the profession but these activities were undertaken by a group of managers along with a production person promoted to trainer. The implementation was not made by someone within the training profession.

Systems Staff Development

The reasons for the development activities that M has described are quite consistent with several of the needs assessment purposes outlined by Rossett. "Comfort level" and "team orientation" were descriptive of concerns for the feelings of trainees. A reduction in "the reluctance to ask questions" seemed to be a solution and "written expectations" were a way of expressing important actuals.

M did not choose the mentoring program after doing her own needs assessment. She employed this program because it was recommended for the type of staff she manages. Even though M had not demonstrated any specific needs assessment activities she recognized and described the resulting purposes associated with an appropriate training and development effort.

M considered it quite important to maintain an emotionally comfortable environment and make this environment conducive to learning. Successful training and development were critical to her group's contribution to the organization. M did not describe any activities that were designed to determine the existence of training needs. M was able to see importance in recognizing feelings even though the benefits of this

recognition might be the most difficult to measure. Actuals and optimal were an important consideration in her approach to staff development.

Field Representative Training

S was responsible for several large programs that began their development before she became involved. She has pursued her activities by looking for incremental improvements in an established system.

Early in her tenure, she recognized that her students and the company were making a substantial time commitment to training. She saw the benefit of reducing the time commitment. In her opinion the overall results were positive. Her change was intended to make the programs more accommodating to the needs of trainees.

S kept the managers involved in the process by soliciting feedback and also by involving some of them in the actual delivery of training. Because of the time and expense involved she had few opportunities observe the actual work activities of her trainees. When these opportunities have occurred she believed the observation was quite beneficial. She hoped to do more observation in the future.

Planning and implementation dominated most of S's time. She was a professional trainer and recognized the value of needs assessment. Her situation included budget and time constraints that limited her opportunity to perform needs assessment activities. If she had or felt that she had the power to bypass these constraints, she would have preferred to do more needs assessment.

Telecommunication Services

C and his project managers utilized a wide array of resources to develop services for various business areas. Training, systems modifications, job aids, and simulations were part of their repertoire for providing new business services to their internal customers.

It became clear after reviewing the literature and particularly performance technology that C's entire job was performing needs assessments. It is doubtful they ever referred to their work as needs assessment but the activities and objectives were basically the same. Other units of the company solicited help from C's department to solve business problems. C and his subordinates would take a comprehensive approach to providing services by training their staff, creating job aids, modify tools, and even providing incentives.

In many ways, C's department was a contradiction to the assertion (Zemke 1998) that needs assessment was not often performed in organizations. Indeed, C and his department were performing needs assessment activities whenever the reengineered their operation for a new type of business. Needs assessment is designed to solve real problems in organizations. C's department did this but without referring to their activities as needs assessment.

They recognized that training alone was not going to prepare their staff to offer new services. Incentives, job aids, and system modifications were important to successful

implementation of these new services. This approach is quite consistent with the practice of performance technology

Underwriting Department

T's description of a successful training endeavor includes early consideration of the feelings of trainees. Groups were used to make the process more manageable. It seemed that careful consideration was given to the entire program. T is a manager concerned about the effectiveness of training for the team members that she leads as well as herself and the other leaders.

T also described an unsuccessful training effort and attributed the lack of success to lack of preparation. She cited lack of preparation. Her descriptions were not specific enough to mention that any needs assessment activities were missed but she does specifically mention that the process was never tested in the first place. Something even more basic than needs assessment was missing.

Needs assessment for employees was done in the form of employee development plans. Like M's area, employees were encouraged by their managers to consider and plan their future learning and development needs. These plans are centered around goals that parallel the gaps between actuals and optimal.

Research Department

L expressed very positive opinions about the wide variety of training opportunities at the company. She contrasted this with the lack of opportunities that she experienced in

a previous position. She was especially impressed with the ability to choose training according to her own perceptions of needs.

Initially L indicated that she extended this freedom of choice to her subordinates with rare exceptions. In further discussions she related several instances where she refused requests for training. She also described her responsibilities as including defining training needs for her subordinates.

Summary

Does the latest knowledge about needs assessment within the training and development profession contrast with actual practices in the organization? Managers combined some of the practices of needs assessment to solve problems. H, C, and T all described successful endeavors that had some elements of needs assessment. Each were addressing several of the purposes in Rossett's framework for needs assessment. The techniques and tools were not inconsistent with the tools and techniques proposed in the literature.

These activities are not much different from the components of the effective needs assessment processes described by Laird (1985), Rossett (1987), and Sleezer (1993). While nothing explicitly called Need Assessment was found to exist in any of the interventions discussed it was easy to find that some of the components of the needs assessment process did exist and were practiced by managers. Is the same latest knowledge utilized by managers and others making training decisions in the workplace? In their self-described successful endeavors, preparation led to success. Lack of

preparation was cited a reason for failure by both T and C. Needs assessment is a form of preparation. Some of the endeavors described by the managers were important enough to the leaders to merit some preparation. In response to this leaders have recommended certain activities. These activities of preparation were important to the managers in order to achieve success.

Is there a practical body of thought that determines when training will be performed in the organization? Managers do value preparation for objectives that they deem important. In the successful projects that involved H, C, and T, they each considered preparatory activities to be key success factors. Unsuccessful endeavors were associated with lack of preparation. The components of needs assessment can be quite palatable to managers as useful activities.

A common complaint in the literature of the training profession is the difficulty in justifying the investment of time and money in training but it appears that some managers are willing to make such commitments when they identify an important objective. Literature in the field counsels practitioners on ways to overcome resistance to needs assessment. This resistance may be overcome by showing the relevance of needs assessment as effective preparation for worthy organizational goals.

If managers are the current, predominant, and enduring occupation that causes training, then what techniques have evolved in their domain? Employee development activities can be a form of needs assessment on an individual basis. This employer encouraged leaders to work with their subordinates on plans of development that are

intended to benefit both the employee and employer. These might be considered needs assessments to find ways to improve the performance of the employee to achieve positive results for the employee and employer. Training practitioners may become more effective contributors to the organization if they can use a Need Assessment approach presented as essential preparation for management's desired objectives.

Recommendations for Further Research

Needs assessment faces obstacles in organizations. Constraints preventing needs assessment include lack of time, staff, expertise. These constraints are relieved only as the organizational budgets allow. This recommends further study to find ways to connect the cost of needs assessment with the benefits. This would need to be combined with effective ways to measure the cost and benefits. Professionals prepared to predict or report these cost and benefits in the form of return on investment could sell their proposals in a language familiar to managers. Clearly many of the benefits and perhaps some of the costs are not easily measured in quantitative terms but some are and this should be done to the extent possible. Organizational resistance might best be surmounted if some evidence connect benefits to the obvious cost of needs assessment activities

The question is also raised as to how should needs assessment be employed when existing programs are in place. ADDIE provides an iterative model of instructional design where the last step, evaluation, loops back to the beginning to rework the instruction program. This implies a process that is self-correcting but the iteration should

include activities to reassess the need for training. The first step, should identify situations where the subsequent steps are not needed because training is not an appropriate solution.

When managers are involved participants of the needs assessment process they can become providers of information rather than gatekeepers. Laird encourages trainers to look to managers when gathering information. When a trainer is directing a needs assessment then there is a transfer and filtering of information that is a step not present when the manager does needs assessment. Laird warns about managers determining needs they might believe necessary. Despite his caution, they have some ability that might be put to good use.

A study of manager directed training activities could examine which typical needs assessment activities were performed and relate that with measures of success for the resulting training. It would also be useful to determine potential benefits of training and other interventions and find ways to measure these benefits in ways that show a clear relationship with organizational goals. Many organizational goals are expressed in dollars but some are not. Perhaps some of the less quantifiable goals can be expressed in a common language for the training profession and managers.

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